

## SOCIAL THEORY AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS

*Mark I. Lichbach*

It is not the "actual" interconnections of "things" but the *conceptual* interconnections of *problems* which define the scope of the various sciences.

*Max Weber*

For the believer there are no questions; for the nonbeliever there are no answers.

*Rabbi Menachem Mendel*

We live ... amid the debris of Reason.

*Adam Seligman*

### INTRODUCTION

I begin where inquiry should always begin: an assessment of the problem situation toward which inquiry is directed (Popper 1965).<sup>1</sup> What is the current state of theory in comparative politics? Compared to twenty-five years ago, self-conscious theoretical reflection finds almost no home in our field. We do not take our theories or our theorists seriously.

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Evidence to support this harsh judgment comes from our leading journal's recent symposium on "The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics" (*World Politics*, October 1995). The participants minimized the value of deductive, a priori theorizing of the sort that is done within strongly defined research communities. While the symposium included widely acknowledged experts in specific research traditions, apparently no one viewed, for example, today's rationalist-culturalist divide as theoretically interesting, exciting, and productive. Structural or institutional analysis was not even recognized as a distinctive theoretical enterprise but rather was thought to be part of the field's "messy center." Most participants feared that comparative politics might return to the sort of Marxist-functional debate that characterized it in the 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, method – prediction, comparison, counterfactuals, history, quantitative and qualitative data, explanation, interpretation, causation, and generalization – was on everyone's mind. The "nomothetic" vs. "ideographic" divide was what really animated discussion. The consensus was that most comparativists are part of the consensus: Today's comparativists practice "theoretically informed empirical political analysis" and adopt "diverse conceptual lenses" (2) and "eclectic combinations" (5). They are interested in "questions" and "empirical puzzles" (10). Hence, "comparative politics is very much a problem-driven field of study" and comparativists are mostly interested in solving "real-world puzzles" (46).

The flaw of this pragmatist, means-oriented heaven is obvious: "If the problem orientation of the field tends to relegate the role of theory mainly to that of a tool of empirical research, the quest for causal generalizations, by contrast, moves its role to the forefront" (47). Similarly, the conclusion from a methods symposium on comparative (small-n) studies in another leading journal (*American Political Science Review*, June 1995) may be stated as paraphrase of Kant: Good theory without good research design is empty; good research design without good theory is blind (454). As Rogowski's (1995) important essay makes clear, one cannot begin inquiry with "evidence" derived from and used to test "theory"; one must begin with theoretically embedded observations. The inevitable conclusion is that researchers must eventually reflect on the nature of that theory – which leads to questions broadly defined as "social theory" or "philosophy of social science."<sup>2</sup>

*World Politics's* symposium did not contribute to the cause of theory in comparative politics because its picture of theory in our field as dominated by a "messy center" is inaccurate and self-defeating. This chapter seeks to refute that perspective and advance theory in comparative politics in three ways.

First, I recognize that three ideal-type research traditions – the rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist – are active in contemporary comparative politics;

just as they are astir throughout the social sciences.<sup>3</sup> Section 1 thus begins the analysis with three exemplary comparativists. Each thinks of himself or herself as a member of a strong research community. Robert H. Bates (1989) argues that he is a rationalist, James C. Scott (1985) identifies with the culturalists, and Theda Skocpol's (1979) work is determined by structuralist principles. While each recognizes the value of synthesis and the cross-fertilization of ideas, each is principally concerned with advancing a particular intellectual tradition and theoretical agenda that transcend comparative politics. Section 2 deepens this analysis by dissecting each research community's ontology, methodology, comparative strategy, lacunae, and subtraditions.

Second, I set the dialogue among the schools within the historical context of the development of social theory. Section 3 thus attempts to understand the three research communities by tracing them back to Talcott Parsons's (1937) effort to systematize several classic social theorists and thereby integrate social theory. I have modified his approach to take account of the structure-action problem of reconciling individuals and collectivities. I call this modified approach the socially embedded unit act. Using this meta-framework to provide insight into the individual frameworks, I demonstrate the underlying unity and significance of the approaches for addressing questions of social theory.

Finally, I set the dialogue among the schools within the historical situation confronting today's comparativists. Section 4 thus seeks an underlying unity in rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought by delving even further back to Max Weber's master problem of a century ago. Weber studied the dialectic of modernity in world historical and comparative perspective: how reason and non-rationality manifest themselves at individual and societal levels with great normative and empirical significance. The dialectic is important to contemporary politics in the West. Due to the West's influence on the globe, the dialectic is equally important to the entire world community of nations.

Section 5 is a summary of my theme about the problem situation of contemporary comparative politics: There are fundamental difficulties with a field that consists only of a "messy center" and basic virtues in a field that embraces creative confrontations, which can include well-defined syntheses in particular research domains, among strongly defined research communities. Comparativists should explore the rationalist-culturalist-structuralist debate and thereby appreciate the different structure-action combinations of interests, identities, and institutions that guide inquiry. Even self-described "problem-oriented" comparativists – those who think of themselves as part of a "messy center" – should be aware of the competing research traditions that have historically been a part of the social sciences. We cannot remain theoretically challenged – a field of theoretical philistines – and actually solve substantive problems. Contemporary com-

<sup>2</sup>Actually, not so inevitable. *World Politics* rejected a version of this chapter with the comment, "Bottom line: the exclusive focus on theory is not for us...." Can a discipline mature if no one specializes in its

<sup>3</sup>The current revival of interest in the philosophy of the social sciences, which has centered on the significance of rationality, culture, and structure for social theory, has become a mini-textbook industry. My graduate syllabus, which contains an un-rudimentary set of references, is available upon request.

parative politics therefore will be greatly enriched by a dialogue among the traditions, especially one that is informed by self-conscious reflection about the enduring issues of social theory.<sup>4</sup> Comparative politics needs strong and yet mutually sympathetic intellectual communities: believers who raise questions and nonbelievers who appreciate answers.

### SECTION 1: THREE EXEMPLARS

In order to demonstrate that our field consists of more than a "messy center," it is necessary to examine comparativists who consciously specialize in specific research traditions. Consider three of the most widely cited and deeply respected works in contemporary comparative politics: Robert H. Bates's (1989) *Beyond the Miracle of the Market*, James C. Scott's (1985) *Weapons of the Weak*, and Theda Skocpol's (1979) *States and Social Revolutions*.

Bates explains how reason shapes the political economy of agrarian development in Kenya. He offers a materialistic theory of political preferences: An actor's location in Kenya's agrarian economy shapes his or her preferences about economic and political institutions. Bates also argues that institutions shape the calculations of political entrepreneurs and hence affect how material interests are defined, organized, and aggregated by vote-maximizing politicians. Interests, in other words, are both materially and politically determined. The tragedy is that these reasoning voters, politicians, consumers, and producers create the drought, famine, and subsistence crises that plague the people of Kenya. Bates's book is therefore a seminal study of "the impact of economic interests upon politics and the impact of institutions upon economic interests" (46), one that explores both the intended (and wanted) and unintended (and unwanted) consequences of reason.

Scott's study of the peasant village of Sedaka in Malaysia takes a very different perspective: "The peasants of Sedaka do not simply react to objective conditions per se but rather to the interpretation they place on those conditions as mediated by values embedded in concrete practices" (305). He argues that the discourses and practices of class conflict in Sedaka take the form of "everyday forms of peasant resistance" in which the poor and the well-to-do abide by different norms and rules. Scott's book is therefore a masterful analysis of the fragile ideological hegemony of the landed elite over the peasantry, one that traces the basis of a reasoning and nonrational class order to the creation of identities and communities.

<sup>4</sup>In the international relations field, the debate between neoliberals and neorealists helps structure inquiry and inform scholarly identities. Articles and books have thus evaluated the meaning and significance of the controversy (Baldwin 1993; Kegley 1993; Keohane 1986). Because they participate in this debate, our colleagues in the field of international relations are well aware of the value of social theory in providing theoretical lenses (Wendt, forthcoming). The underlying purpose of this chapter and volume

Skocpol, in a comment that could have been directed at Bates or Scott, rejects a "purposive image" of social causation that "suggests that revolutionary processes and outcomes can be understood in terms of the activity and initiation or interests of the key group(s) who launched the revolution in the first place" (17). Skocpol explains revolution by "rising above" the subjective viewpoints — the interests and identities — of the participants. She takes a structural perspective, or "an impersonal and nonsubjective viewpoint — one that emphasizes patterns of relationships among groups and societies" (18). Skocpol is especially interested in "the institutionally determined situations and relations of groups within society and upon the interrelations of societies within world-historically developing international structures" (18). Skocpol's book is therefore a classic comparative historical analysis of revolution in France, Russia, and China, one that traces the reason (e.g., the development of democracy, markets, and state bureaucracies) and irrationality (e.g., the blind violence and human costs) of revolution to an "iron cage" of forces<sup>5</sup> that operate behind the backs of individuals.

In sum, Bates offers a rational/social choice study of how interests produce the dialectic of reason and irrationality in Kenya's political economy, Scott a culturalist/interpretivist account of how communities and identities constitute the dialectic in Malaysia's class relations, and Skocpol a structuralist/institutionalist analysis of how social forces drive the dialectic in the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions. Even a cursory examination of our recent journals and books reveals that comparativists today have indeed coalesced around these three competing research schools: Social choice theories, culturalist approaches, and structural analyses offer competing visions of the field. As in political science more generally and social science even more generally, interests, identities, and institutions contend for theoretical primacy in comparative politics (Garrett and Weingast 1993; Hecló 1994; Selznick 1992: 78)

This significance of the rationalist-culturalist-structuralist dialogue in comparative politics is also demonstrated by the contributions to this volume that examine substantive research areas. Peter A. Hall shows that the field of comparative political economy involves a lively and fairly equal struggle among interest-, idea-, and institution-oriented perspectives. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly indicate that the three main concepts used to explain contentious politics — political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural frames — embody rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist elements. Joel S. Migdal maintains that rational choice and culturalist perspectives have been marginal to comparative studies of the state but are now challenging the hegemonic structuralist perspective. Finally, Samuel H. Barnes evinces that the survey research tradition in the study of voter turnout and partisan choice has been affected by all the perspectives but has come to rely recently on the (declining?) rationalist approach.

<sup>5</sup>Weber's ([1904-05] 1985: 181) used of the term actually corresponds to an iron cage that is originally produced by actors and their ideas but eventually becomes a set of material forces that externally constrain individuals.

If space permitted, the footprint of the rationalist-culturalist-structuralist dialogue could have been traced in comparative studies of democratization, globalization, modernization, and several other substantive domains.

The intellectual problem, of course, is that as one contemplates the three exemplars from the competing research schools, one is forced to recall a line from the old Monty Python show – “and now for something completely different.” How are we to make sense of the fact that three such different theoretical perspectives coexist in the same field of comparative politics? Perhaps we should ask the question in ways that engage our three authors. Can rationalists, culturalists, and structuralists secure mutually profitably intellectual exchange, or is monopoly inevitable? What overall meaning can the three schools have, apart from a teleology toward ideological hegemony? How can a single discipline be structured such that the three perspectives coexist, or must one approach institutionalize its victory?

In the face of this disorienting pluralism, partialism, and perspectivism, admirers of Weber can take comfort in one of his memorable lines: “It is not the ‘actual’ interconnections of ‘things’ but the *conceptual* interconnections of *problems* which define the scope of the various sciences” ([1903-17] 1949: 68, emphasis in original). This nominalist proposition follows from the Kantian argument that concepts or theories without empirical intuition or observation are empty phrases; empirical intuition without concepts is blind. Kant thus stresses the ordering function of theory and the impotence of experience without the guidance of theory. Combining Weber and Kant, the message to comparativists is clear: The choice of a preconception or framework for ordering the chaos inherent in reality and hence for guiding empirical study is the fundamental analytical question. The rationalist-culturalist-structuralist dialogue indeed shapes inquiry. The question to be addressed now is how it does so.

## SECTION 2: THE THREE RESEARCH SCHOOLS

Bates, Scott, and Skocpol can be best understood as exemplars of ideal-type research schools in the social sciences. Each tradition shares an ontology, a methodology, and a philosophy of science. Each also faces characteristic lacunae which account for its historical development into subschools. Similarities and differences among the approaches are summarized in Table 1.

This table can be used in two ways: working down the properties and comparing rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought; or working across the research communities and comparing properties. Comparative case studies of the rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist research programs appear in the chapters in this volume by, respectively, Margaret Levi, Marc Howard Ross, and Ira Katznelson. Rather than repeating their configurative discussions here, I will adopt the second approach. With apologies to Ira Katznelson (this volume), I will “slice and dice” my variables

Table 1. *Research Communities and Their Properties*

| Property      | Community   |   |   |
|---------------|---|---|---|
|               | Rationalist   | Culturalist   | Structuralist   |
| Ontology      | Rational actors<br>Intentional explanation<br>Actions, beliefs, desires<br>Methodological individualism   | Rules among actors<br>Intersubjectivity<br>Common knowledge<br>Common values              | Relations among Actors<br>Holism                                    |
| Methodology   | Comparative statics<br>Irrational social consequences of individually rational action<br>Unintended, unwanted, unavoidable, unexpected outcomes | Meaning and significance<br>Culture as cause/constitutes reality, identity, action, order | Social types with causal powers<br>Structures with laws of dynamics |
| Comparison    | Positivism<br>Generalization<br>Explanation   | Interpretivism<br>Case study<br>Understanding   | Realism<br>Comparative history<br>Causality                         |
| Lacunae       | Instrumental rationality<br>Mechanical-behavioral view of subjectivity  | Tautology, teleology in existence and causal impact on outcomes                           | Iron cage determinism<br>Voluntarism absent                         |
| Subtraditions | Human nature rationalists<br>Social situation rationalists  | Subjectivists<br>Intersubjectivists   | State/society<br>Pluralism-Marxism-statism                          |
| Exemplars     | Robert H. Bates   | James C. Scott  | Theda Skocpol   |

## ONTOLOGY

Each school is founded on certain presuppositions about the way the world is constructed. Each perspective, that is, assumes something about the nature of existence: the entities and their properties that populate our lives.

Rationalists like Bates are methodological individualists who argue that collectivities have no status apart from the individuals who comprise them: Only actors choose, prefer, believe, learn, and so on. All explanations of groups, rationalists argue, must therefore be understandable in terms of individuals. People, in turn, must be understood with intentional explanations of rational choice: De-

sires and beliefs direct action. In other words, if actions are taken for certain reasons, then the reasons motivate the actions. The concept of "interest" follows: If action A is in person P's interest, then P must be able to supply a reason for doing A. Rationalists are therefore concerned with the collective processes and outcomes that follow from intentionality, or the social consequences of individually rational action. Often these consequences are quite irrational: They are unintended, unwanted, unavoidable, and unexpected, albeit inevitable. For example, Bates's (1989: 1) first lines are: "This book is about the political economy of development. It is about the politics and economics of agriculture. And it is about Kenya." Bates then indicates that he will use the Coase Theorem, a microeconomic perspective that focuses on the transaction costs of individual exchange, to explore the efficiency of institutions, governments, and politics. In sum, rationalist ontology depicts a world populated by rational individuals and possibly irrational collectivities. The rational pursuit of individual interest explains the all-too-common occurrence of irrational social outcomes.

Culturalists are methodological holists who think of norms as intersubjective or transindividual: The members of a group or community have common, mutual, or shared ideas, orientations, or ways of looking at the world. These values are found in all of society's institutions – political, religious, economic, and social – and in society as a whole. Intersubjective consciousness is composed, more specifically, of two elements: cognitions and conscience. Culture involves common knowledge – is's and not should's – about the construction of reality. Culture also involves common understandings about the way the world should be. Common cognitions and conscience are constitutive of community. Hence, Scott (1985: 234) refers to "the moral logic of tradition" in which custom, ritual, and norms define a community's meaningful roles or expectations.

Culture and community – common cognition and common conscience – are in many ways the bases of social order. First, they are needed for the practical management of daily social life. Collective action and social coordination require mutuality of information and values. Second, culture and community underlie the affective and emotional symbolism of daily life. The world is constituted by social interactions and communicative acts endowed with meaning and significance. Third, culture and community are the bases of social control. Roles dictate standards of social respect, recognition, "reputation, status, and prestige" (Scott 1985: 234). These, in turn, provide social sanctions that restrain self-seeking individualism, "dog-eat-dog" competition, and "beggar-thy-neighbor" strategies of survival. As Scott (17) puts it, "For it is shame, the concern for the good opinion of one's neighbors and friends, which circumscribes behavior within the normal boundaries created by shared values." Fourth, culture and community provide standards of individual and collective obligation "that lie beyond immediate relations of production and serve both to create and to signify the existence of community – one that is more than just an aggregation of producers" (169). Hence, there is a "collective and public recognition that the village has an obligation to pro-

and preferences make the village, in effect, "one family" (196). Finally, culture and community underlie personal and group identities. The self is really a "communal self" developed in interactions with others. Culture is therefore *both* outside *and* inside individuals: external, in that it is materially real and transmitted from the past; internal, in that individuals are socialized into it.

While culture constitutes social order, Scott argues that it is contested. In contradistinction to the Parsonians, he (xviii) offers a "meaning-centered account of class relations" in Sedaka in which class consciousness is constitutive of class relations and class conflict. Hence, there is a "public symbolic order" (25) that is based on a "symbolic balance of power" (22). Class conflict thus turns out to be "a struggle over the appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labeled, a struggle to identify causes and assess blame, a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history" (xvii). For example, the breaking of accepted social conventions and behavioral norms leads to the symbols and exemplars of "the greedy rich" and "the grasping poor" (18).

Culture is therefore constitutive of both consensus and conflict. On the one hand, class struggle "requires a shared worldview ... [it only makes sense] unless there are shared standards of what is deviant, unworthy, impolite" (xvii). On the other hand, class struggle is contingent on shared values that are betrayed: "What is in dispute is not values but the facts to which those values might apply: who is rich, who is poor, how rich, how poor, is so-and-so stingy, does so-and-so shirk work?" (xvii).

In sum, culturalist ontology assumes that culturally embedded individuals follow social rules that are constitutive of their individual and group identities. In contrast to the rationalists, interests are not merely given and/or random; reason is not necessary and universal but conditional and contingent; and the categories of rational thought and the nature of rationality vary by culture.

Structuralists are also methodological holists. They study networks, linkages, interdependencies, and interactions among the parts of some system. A structural argument is therefore always concerned with the relationships – both static and dynamic – among individuals, collectivities, institutions, or organizations.<sup>6</sup> One can understand a thing, structuralists argue, only if it is related to other things of which it is a part. Hence, entities are defined in terms of relationships with other entities and not in terms of their own intrinsic properties. Waltz (1979: 81) thus argues that "in defining structures the first question to answer is this: What is the principle by which the parts are arranged?" He (74) offers the example of George and Martha in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* George and Martha are a pair of individuals whose fortunes cannot be separated into individual-level components: Their fate is rooted in their (marital) relationship.

Structuralists thus focus on the political, social, and economic connections among people. Historically rooted and materially based processes of distribution,

<sup>6</sup>Higher-level structures can, of course, be composed of lower-level structures. For example, the state is a structure that can enter into a structural relationship with other states in the international system.

conflict, power, and domination, thought to drive social order and social change, are their particular concern. Skocpol (1979), for example, argues that state breakdown, peasant revolutions, and state reconstruction have structural causes. Her structure-conflict-change approach to state and revolution emphasizes five structures. First, the international context: Skocpol focuses on international structures and relations, or war and trade, and the world-historical circumstances in which states find themselves. Second, intranational class conflicts: Skocpol is concerned with "historically specific institutional arrangements" (116, emphasis in original), such as "agrarian class and local political structures" (117), that affect intra-class and interclass relations.<sup>7</sup> Third, the nature of the revolutionary crisis: The processes of state breakdown and of peasant revolts become the legacies of the Old Regime that affect state reconstruction. Fourth, the nature of states: Skocpol explores states as "administrative and coercive organizations" (14) that penetrate society and control people and territory. Finally, the relations of states and classes: Skocpol is particularly interested in "the potential autonomy of the state" from dominant and subordinate classes in society (24).<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to rationalists and subjective culturalists like survey researchers, structuralists reject an agential and reductionist focus on the actors themselves. Skocpol is very forceful on this point. She (14) argues that "an adequate understanding of social revolutions requires that the analyst take a nonvoluntarist, structural perspective on their causes and processes." Hence, "any valid explanation of revolution depends upon the analyst's 'rising above' the viewpoints of participants" (18) and taking "an impersonal and nonsubjective viewpoint" (18). Skocpol (29) thus prefers to "emphasize objective relationships and conflicts among variously situated groups and nations, rather than the interests, outlooks or ideologies of particular actors in revolutions." In other words, she focuses on the "structural contradictions and conjunctural occurrences beyond the deliberate control of avowed revolutionaries" (291)

Skocpol thus forcefully rejects a voluntarist approach to revolution based on mobilizable groups and "the emergence of a deliberate effort" (15).<sup>9</sup> She argues

<sup>7</sup>Intra-class relations include what she calls "peasant solidarity," or the peasantry's internal organization and resources. Hence, Skocpol (115) explores "the degrees and kinds of solidarity of peasant communities." Interclass relations include what she calls "peasant autonomy from direct day-to-day supervision and control by landlords and their agents" (115). Skocpol hypothesizes that rentier agrarian class relations, those with absentee nobles and a landed peasantry, beget numerous peasant conflicts, while large estates managed by nobles and worked by serfs or landless labor resist peasant rebellions. Part of her explanation also involves the political structures of local government and its relation to peasantry and national government: "Those vulnerable agrarian orders also had sanctioning machineries that were centrally and bureaucratically controlled" (117).

<sup>8</sup>She is thus concerned with the relations between the state and the dominant (rural) classes. In "statist societies" she suggests that the state was autonomous from the nobility and hence better able to push through needed reforms (e.g., prerevolutionary Russia modernized more than prerevolutionary China). Skocpol is also concerned with the relationship between the state and the dominated (rural) classes. Peasant rebellions are a function, first, of whether the state penetrated the peasantry and consequently did not rely on local elites for social control and, second, "the relaxation of state coercive sanctions against peasant

that analysts should not assume self-conscious and purposive revolutionary vanguards or movements whose members share grievances and goals. Hence, Skocpol minimizes the ability of revolutionary leaderships backed by revolutionary ideologies (e.g., Jacobinism, Marxism-Leninism) to transform the state. She prefers to focus on the structural conditions under which elites struggle to consolidate and use state power, or the "specific possibilities and impossibilities within which revolutionaries must operate as they try to consolidate the new regime" (171). Revolutionaries thus do things they never intended, and preferences, goals, and ideologies are not a valid guide to outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, structuralist ontology explores how relations among social agents are concretely structured. Skocpol thus focuses on "objective structural conditions" rather than on "politically manipulable subjective conditions" (16).

Rationalists therefore study how actors employ reason to satisfy their interests, culturalists study rules that constitute individual and group identities, and structuralists explore relations among actors in an institutional context. Reasons, rules, and relations are the various starting points of inquiry.

## METHODOLOGY

Schools also have explanatory strategies. Each possesses a "positive heuristic" for argumentation (Lakatos 1970).

Rationalists engage in vicarious problem solving. As Schelling (1978: 18) puts it, "If we know what problem a person is trying to solve, and if we think he can actually solve it, and if we can solve it too, we can anticipate what our subject will do by putting ourselves in his place and solving his problem as we think he sees it." Once they place themselves in a problem situation, rationalists, as Bates (1989: 9-10) indicates, perform a *gedanken* or thought experiment that involves two time periods. In the first period, their model is in equilibrium. The model is then perturbed by a series of exogenous shocks. In the second period, rationalists observe the impact of the exogenous changes on the endogenous variables of concern.

What kind of exogenous shocks are possible in these comparative static exercises? Since rationalists are intentionalists, variations in action can only be explained by variations in desires and beliefs. Rationalists, moreover, gravitate to-

<sup>9</sup>She maintains, more specifically, that voluntaristic theories of revolution go wrong in four ways. First, they get the process wrong: Revolutionary intentions develop in the course of revolution. Second, they get the counterfactuals wrong: Such theories imply a voluntaristic conception of political order and stability. Third, they get the causes wrong: Revolutionary crises simply occur and are historically nonvoluntaristic, rather than being "made" by revolutionary movements. Finally, they get the outcomes wrong: States are not constructed by the revolutionary agency of vanguard parties.

<sup>10</sup>Similar to the rationalists, Skocpol looks at revolutions as the unintended consequences of the interaction of rational actors or sets of actors: "Revolutionary conflicts have invariably given rise to outcomes neither fully foreseen nor intended by — nor perfectly serving the interests of — any of the particular groups involved" (1979: 18). The term she (298, fn. 44) uses here is "conjuncture": "the coming together of separately determined and not consciously coordinated (or deliberately revolutionary) processes and group efforts." Rather than focusing on explicitly formulated intergroup coalitions, she thus prefers to focus on

ward materialist theories of preference and cognition. The material constraints of the "objective external world" are held to affect action because they influence the desires and beliefs of the "subjective internal world" of the actor. In other words, rationalists are positivists who restrict their comparative static exercises to hard or "objective" shocks because they wish to avoid studying fuzzy or "subjective" ones (Lichbach 1996: 233). Rationalists consequently explore the conditions of choice: the shadow, relative, or opportunity prices (in terms of forgone material opportunities) of action. For example, Bates (1989: 10) indicates that "in the early portions of this work, the shock is the colonial incursion. In the later portions, it is a failure of the rains. In the intermediate periods, the shocks include variations in access to land, cash crops, or productive ecological zones." While Bates certainly understands the culture of Kenya, and he certainly factors it into his equilibrium model, what ultimately drive his analysis are independent and exogenous material shocks and forces. As Bates (153) reluctantly and revealingly puts it, he "has been driven to a materialist conception of politics." In sum, empirically oriented rationalists are ultimately materialists in that they assume that material conditions drive subjective consciousness and ultimately rational choice. Rational actor theories are consequently parasitic on material structuralist ones.

Human actions are intentional: People express and act upon purposes. Culturalists like Scott (1985: 45) thus argue that the human sciences should concern themselves with the emotions, attitudes, and other subjective dispositions that allow researchers to evaluate the meaning and significance of human interaction. It is only by penetrating the frames of meaning used by actors that analysts can explore how culture causes and constitutes reality, identity, action, and social order. The methodology of interpretation, hermeneutics, or *verstehen* makes four fundamental assumptions. First, interpretive approaches are premised on the idea that participants' understandings might not be the same as scientists' understandings.<sup>11</sup> Interpretivists thus attempt to see things from the actor's point of view or in terms of his or her own self-understanding. Their goal is therefore to produce an empathetic awareness of the outlooks, feelings, motives, and experiences of another. Second, since the meaning of an action is comprehended in light of the agent's particular situation, the norms, forms, and practices of his or her society are relevant. Interpretation thus involves value relevance: Meaning is relative to culture. Third, interpretation involves a hermeneutic circle: The parts must be understood in terms of the whole and the whole must be understood in terms of its parts. Meaning, in other words, must be established holistically or by relating individual and society. Finally, comprehending the material world is not the same as comprehending the social world. The social world must be understood from within rather than explained from without. In fact, the analyst should limit himself or herself to comprehending the self-understanding of human beings. He or she must go beyond establishing the materialistic causal connections

<sup>11</sup>Weber (cited in Calhoun 1995: 48) offers a classic rejoinder to this perspectivism: "One does not

sought by rationalist *gedanken*: Instead of seeking the external causes of behavior, analysts should seek the internal meaning of action. Understanding rather than explanation is therefore the goal: Positivists study cause-and-effect explanations, rooted in the nomothetic idea that recurrent law-like processes exist, and interpretivists seek interpretive understanding rooted in the ideographic idea that societies are unique. In sum, culturalists reject materialistically oriented positivism and adopt an interpretive philosophy of science. They study how reason and non-rationality are constitutive of individuals and societies.

Structuralists study structures and hence adopt a realist philosophy of science. Realism is characterized by two basic principles that are very compatible with structuralism.

First, realists adopt an entity- rather than an event-centered ontology: "Entities (ontology) condition theories (epistemology)" (Wendt forthcoming: 20). Realists thus assume that objects and entities – perhaps known only by their effects – exist in the world. For example, the state is real and is not simply a police car; similarly, the international state system is real and is not just the U.N. charter. Structures are thus real entities or objects. Realists assume that mature scientific theories typically refer directly to this real world of (perhaps unobservable) objects and hence provide knowledge of reality "out there." Scientific theories are therefore about the basic building blocks of the world, including their properties and interactions. Scientists search for these fundamental entities, called "natural kinds" in their particular domains of inquiry. Natural kinds have a differentiated structure and hence coherence and unity: They are forms or kinds of things with interconnected parts or elements. Hence, a natural kind is more than a heap of properties or an ad hoc collection of bundles of qualities. For example, a dog is a natural kind; a pile of sand or five randomly chosen objects on my desk are not.

The implications for social science are that social structures are real and that social scientists should search for "social kinds." Little (1993: 190) argues that "candidates for social kinds include 'riot,' 'revolution,' 'class,' 'religion,' 'share cropping land-tenure system,' 'constitutional monarchy,' 'market economy,' 'nationalist political movement,' 'international trading regime,' and 'labor union.'" Skocpol thus focuses on historically concrete types of cases: "This book does not, of course, analyze in depth all available historical cases of social revolution. Nor does it analyze a 'random' sample from the entire universe of possible cases. In fact, comparative historical analysis works best when applied to a set of a few cases that share certain basic features. Cases need to be carefully selected and the criteria of grouping them together made explicitly" (1979: 40). Hence, France, Russia, and China "have been grouped together as fundamentally *similar* cases of social revolution" (40, emphasis in original). Why? "It is the premise of this work that France, Russia, and China exhibited important similarities in their Old Regimes and revolutionary processes and outcomes – similarities more than sufficient to warrant their treatment together as one pattern calling for a coherent causal explanation" (41).

Second, these perhaps unobservable natural or social kinds – what I have termed structures – have, following Skocpol, causal powers. Wendt (forthcoming: 26) suggests that “the behavior of things is influenced by self-organizing or homeostatic internal structures, and the analysis of those structures should to that extent figure in explanations of behavior.” Realists argue that scientists search for these real – albeit hidden – causal mechanisms. For example, chemistry looks for chemical elements and the laws of chemistry; physics looks for elementary particles and the laws of physics. Hence, structure, process, and outcome are linked: Natural bodies or kinds have natural proclivities or powers which produce natural laws of development. Piaget (cited in Lloyd 1986: 257, emphasis in original) thus maintains that “*there is no structure apart from construction.*” Structuralists thus follow Aristotle and assume that structures have actualities and potentialities and that form determines development. These law-like processes thus involve production and reproduction, stability and change, growth and development, and maintenance and transformation.

The implication for social science, as Ira Katznelson develops in his contribution to this volume, is that social structures must be analyzed in macro-historical and macrodevelopmental perspective. The substantive concerns include state-building, war, capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization. Structural mechanisms that produce these historical dynamics include competition, conflict, consensus, division of labor, differentiation, diversity, distribution, inequality, stratification, polarity, size, density, and hierarchy. Still other structural logics that produce dynamics involve contradictions, paradoxes, ironies, and unintended consequences. Examples abound. Adam Smith argues that in the pursuit of private gain society organizes itself and thereby produces a market governed by the laws of supply and demand. Karl Marx argues that capitalist societies have a different set of laws of development and ones that lead to their own demise. Max Weber argues that patriarchalism, domination by notables, political patrimonialism, feudalism, hierarchy, Caesaropapism, bureaucracy, charismatic community, church, sect, household, neighborhood, kin group, ethnic group, oikos, and enterprise have characteristic patterns of development.

Skocpol is thus concerned with the concrete historical dynamics of a certain type of state (1979: 304, fn. 1). What types of old-regime states that she studied were susceptible to social revolution? “Autocratic,” “protobureaucratic,” “imperial,” “monarchies” that were “well-established,” “wealthy,” “politically ambitious,” “historically autonomous,” and in “noncolonial” states with “statist societies” and “agrarian” economies that faced “intense international military competition” from “economically developed military competitors” underwent social revolution (1979: 41; 161; 167; 285; 287-8; 304, fn. 4). What type of state was the outcome of the social revolutions she studied? Bureaucratic and mass-incorporating states – rationalized, autonomous, and powerful – were the products of revolution.

In sum, structuralists analyze real social types with causal powers and hence study the historical dynamics of structures. This implies that they are opposed to

the rationalist's atomistic reductionism. Structuralists indeed reject the view that social life can be explained by particles of matter and their movement, which are subject only to the laws of motion and their own material nature. Skocpol thus opposes “strategies of analytic simplification” (294). She argues that analysts (5) should not concentrate “only upon one analytic feature (such as violence or political conflict) that characterizes major social revolutions. Rather, “we must look at the revolutions as wholes, in much of their complexity.” Structuralists, moreover, view cause as natural necessity. This implies that they violate the rationalist's Hempelian deductive-nomological approach to explanation (see Alan Zuckerman's chapter in this volume). Structuralists indeed transgress a positivism that sees cause as entailing only logical necessity.

Rationalists therefore perform comparative static experiments, culturalists produce interpretive understanding, and structuralists study the historical dynamics of real social types. Positivism, interpretivism, and realism are the possible philosophies of social science.

### COMPARISON

Given a school's ontology and methodology, each develops an approach to comparison. All take a stand on the ideographic-nomothetic debate and on the question of covering laws and causal accounts raised in Alan Zuckerman's essay in this volume.

Rationalist methodology involves the comparative-static experiments discussed earlier that link structure to action. This comparative static methodology sounds like the basis for generalization. It is indeed the ideal PGM – proposition generating machine. Rationalists see individuals as hardheaded scientists who ground their preferences and beliefs in the material world. Similarly, rationalists see themselves as hardheaded scientists who conduct *gedanken* and then evaluate their success. Rationalists are thus careful to specify what counts as decisive evidence against their experiments. They think in terms of observable implications that are falsifiable (i.e., rationalists suggest null hypotheses and counterfactuals). For example, Bates (1989: ch. 4) offers a series of regression equations that demonstrate that political institutions and public policies affect Kenya's food stocks and thus stand between drought and famine. Refuting theories of unregulated markets offered by neoconservative development economists and of benevolently regulated markets offered by neoliberal development economists, he presents statistical evidence of a “policy-induced food cycle” (111). Institutions, that is, “may generate pressures that convert abundance into dearth and therefore translate droughts into food crises.” Bates considers these lessons generalizable to agrarian politics in other Third World countries. As he puts it, “this chapter has taught us about subsistence crises” (115). In sum, rationalists are led, as if by an invisible hand, to quantitative methodologies and a positivist philosophy of science. They attempt to account for an explanandum (irrational social action) by fitting it into a structure of knowledge: Initial conditions (about rational desires



and beliefs) and general laws (about their operation) allow rationalists to deduce the anomalous (irrational) phenomenon in question.<sup>12</sup>

Culturalist methodology involves gaining interpretive understanding of meaning. Since meaning is peculiar to particular cultures, culturalists favor case studies. Moreover, they stress the uniqueness of cases. Individual cases are characterized by radical historical contingency. Individual developments are largely open-ended historical accidents in four ways. First, outcomes are paradoxical: They are unintended and unwanted. Second, outcomes are path-dependent: Critical events and tipping points shape history. Locally, cases are temporally ordered and historically connected sequences of events. Globally, cases are subject to spatial and temporal diffusion as each case changes the context within which subsequent cases operate. Third, outcomes are multifarious: Multiple equilibria are possible and counterfactuals are always relevant. Finally, outcomes are unstable and unpredictable: The forces that produce any one outcome are finely balanced, and hence short-run.

Culturalists are therefore suspicious of generalizing across cases. They reject the idea of nomothetic research conducted on random samples of the world's current population of states in order to develop generalizations that hold independently of space, time, and context. All universals, uniformities, and invariants are suspect. Norms, means, and averages are just that. Theories are never fulfilled precisely the same way in all situations. Cases are not merely instances of general things – lifeless variables, categories, and abstractions. Modifications, exceptions, and qualifications are the rule. Hence, comparativists should not think in terms of ideal-type theories and concepts. These do not exist, have never existed, and will never exist. In short, all grand historical narratives and totalizing universal histories must be deconstructed.

Rather than compare to establish vague similarities, culturalists believe that comparativists should compare to establish sharp differences. Comparativists should thus be historical relativists. They should positively value diversity and multiplicity; expect historical particularity, specificity, and locality; understand individuality, singularity, uniqueness, and distinctiveness; appreciate deviants, outliers, idiosyncrasies, unrepresentativeness, and anomalies; and hence study variation, heterogeneity, fragmentation, differentiation, and plurality.

For example, Scott (1985: xviii) states that "a certain amount of storytelling seems absolutely essential to convey the texture and conduct of class relations." Larger theoretical "considerations require, I think the flesh and blood of detailed instances to take on substance. An example is not only the most successful way of embodying a generalization but also has the advantage of always being richer and more complex than the principles that are drawn from it" (xviii). Hence, Scott opens his book with two wonderful stories of social outcasts: Razak, the

symbol of "the grasping poor," and "Haji 'Broom,'" the symbol of "the greedy rich" (18).

In sum, culturalists stress configurative paths – there are as many paths as there are cultures. Hence, comparativists should compare in order to establish the differences among a set of developments.<sup>13</sup> They should study phenomena in their local and concrete historical context, focusing on their origins and outcomes.

Now consider the structuralists. Structures are patterned objects. There are obviously systematic similarities and differences among these patterns. Structuralists thus divide objects into species and genera. Their theoretical generalizations and statements are confined to particular classes and categories of phenomena. Structuralists can therefore be located between the universalists (rationalists) and the particularists (culturalists): Between all and each lie some. Structuralists thus achieve generality by partitioning cases into subsets and establishing classificatory frameworks.

While structures come in types and structuralists are basically classifiers, the way things are grouped by kind is very important to structuralists. As realists, they argue that scientists must take note of the real and objective divisions in the world: Analysts should divide nature at its joints. They reject the idea of nominalist, artificial, or subjective classifications that are merely imposed by observers and arbitrarily given by language. Divisions, in other words, are discovered and not invented. This is why Skocpol (1979), for example, focuses on the historically concrete forms of the state mentioned earlier.

Structuralists thus classify cases into a number of categories, each fundamentally different from one another. They then investigate the historical dynamics associated with each class. Similar processes, sequences, and laws thus occur in similar structures; different processes, sequences, and laws occur in different structures. A small number of typical paths of development and change are thereby located. Structuralists therefore do comparative histories to discover the historical laws of structural development. State breakdown and peasant revolutions occur according to Skocpol (1979), for example, differently in agrarian bureaucracies than in postcolonial regimes. Because of differences in initial conditions, institutions, structures, groups, and contexts, similar causes or shocks (e.g., wars) produce dissimilar effects in different systems.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, different contexts within a similar overall type produce similar outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

This typological approach limits the generalizability of one's findings to the type of cases examined. Hence, Skocpol (288) asks, "Can [these findings] be applied beyond the French, Russian, and Chinese cases? In a sense, the answer is unequivocally 'no': one cannot mechanically extend the specific causal arguments that have been developed for France, Russia, and China into a 'general theory of revolutions' applicable to all other modern social revolutions. There are two im-

<sup>13</sup>This was one of Weber's principal methodological themes (Lichbach 1995: 290-1).

<sup>14</sup>Examples include Brenner (1976, 1982) and Katzenstein (1978).

<sup>15</sup>Examples include Moore (1966) and Skocpol (1979).

<sup>12</sup>Margaret Levi, in her contribution to this volume, indicates that some comparatively and historically oriented rationalists are moving away from positivist comparative-static exercises and toward "ana-

portant reasons why such a strategy would be fruitless." First, new cases might have new causes: "The causes of revolutions (whether of individual cases, or sets of similar cases) necessarily vary according to the historical and international circumstances of the countries involved" (288). Second, new cases might interact with old causes: "Patterns of revolutionary causation and outcomes are affected by world-historical changes in the fundamental structures and bases of state power as such" (288). Skocpol (290) concludes that "other revolutions require analyses in their own right" because they occur in different types of structures (e.g., in different states and in different world-historical circumstances).

In sum, structuralist comparison involves three steps. The first step involves classification: Structuralists locate different configurations of bounded and patterned action and interactions. The second step involves morphology: The principles that structure the relationships among the parts, or the theme, logic, or rules that establish the functioning of a configuration or form, are specified. The final step involves dynamics: A structure's development, institutionalization, and change are studied. This involves a focus on origins, or how the structure comes into being; maintenance, or how the structure comes to be stable; and transformation, or how the structure changes.

Rationalists therefore generalize, culturalists particularize, and structuralists typologize. Comparativists can compare to establish similarities, differences, or both similarities and differences.

### LACUNAE

A school's particular ontology, methodology, and approach to the ideographic-nomothetic problem produce characteristic strengths and weaknesses. A comparative analysis of the approaches illuminates these virtues and vices.

The rationalist perspective is "externalist," "behaviorist," or "throughput": Given that rational actors attempt to efficiently adapt to their environment, external conditions and not human consciousness are the focus of the theory. Rationalists thus tend toward a mechanical-behavioral view of subjectivity and adopt a particularly anemic or thin version of intentionality, rationality, and interests. Actors are thus left with an impoverished orientation to action: People are computing devices and mechanical robots who calculate their interests. Rationalists who explain action in terms of exogenously changing prices thus inevitably slight the individual and group identity-formation question: Personal and communal identities are treated as exogenous to rather than constitutive of stable and orderly social relationships and interactions. For example, Bates (1989: 150) suggests that people are concerned with efficiency and Pareto-optimality because it can help everyone including themselves: "In an almost Marxian manner, the theory contends that people devise institutions so as to unleash the full productive potential of their economies." While this materialism might seem to be the basis of mutual cooperation and social order, the problem is that people are even more concerned with distribution, power, and

property rights because these can help them most of all: "People see clearly where their interests lie. They invest in the creation of institutions in order to structure economic and political life so as better to defend their position within them. They invest in institutions so as to vest their interests" (151). Hence, rationalists like Bates ultimately offer a materialist theory of preferences<sup>16</sup> under which interest is an obstacle rather than a basis for social order: Rationalists view ends as random in a positive sense and as equal in a normative sense, which means that values ultimately divide rather than unite people. In sum, rationalists sacrifice the subject and surrender the self, undoing the community and unmaking the collectivity<sup>17</sup>

Scott (1985: 27) asks, "Why are we here, in a village of no particular significance, examining the struggle of a handful of history's losers?" Evidently, "the big battalions of the state, of capitalist relations in agriculture and of demography itself," which beget the metanarratives of large-scale peasant rebellion and revolution, "are arrayed against them." His answer is that while the material dimensions of class conflict and social change are undeniable, conflict and change must ultimately be understood interpretively. Other culturalists go even further than Scott, adopt an all-embracing Hegelianism, and argue that it is "ideas all the way down." Whether they are moderates or extremists, culturalists face the problem that the existence and causal impact of culture is difficult if not impossible to investigate. There are major problems with testing arguments about the existence of norms because norms vary by people, context, time, integration, intensity, and completeness. For example, Samuel H. Barnes in this volume shows that partisan allegiance has temporal instabilities and comparative nonequivalences. Moreover, norms are not directly observable and are subject to the "owl of minerva" problem (i.e., they are easiest to discover when they are in decline). This leads to the second major problem faced by the culturalists: testing arguments about the consequences of norms. Do norms actually produce action and outcomes? When action and the material world are swept up into an all-embracing Hegelian idealism, teleology and tautology are inevitable. Hence, culturalists face the problem of eliminating plausible rival hypotheses. Their ideas are significant but nonfalsifiable. For example, while Scott (1985: 139) does suggest several "standards of evidence and inference" on which one interpretation is to be preferred to another, he does not pretend to offer a research design capable of separating idealist from materialist forces. In sum, culturalists do not attempt to separate the material from the ideal because they assume that material must always be interpreted in terms of the ideal.<sup>18</sup>

As indicated earlier, Skocpol (1979) minimizes the voluntarism of revolutionary masses and elites and slights the significance of their values, beliefs, and

<sup>16</sup>A related criticism is that they also have a materialist theory of beliefs.

<sup>17</sup>A related criticism thus challenges the rationalist's methodological individualism.

<sup>18</sup>Other critiques of cultural analyses of politics are developed by Marc Howard Ross in his contribution to this volume.

actions. Her purely structural theory emphasizes that structures, not actions, produce outcomes. She argues a rigid methodological holistic position: Structure is significant and individual actions, desires, and beliefs are not. In other words, individuals have no choices. They are all but eliminatable, overwhelmed by structure. People are merely "bearers," "carriers," or "supporters" of functions determined by objective structures.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, when structuralists consider individuals, they tend to homogenize them. All people within a category are the same, merely role players who lack individuality. Culturalists thus charge that strict structuralists study history without a subject. Human beings are made into mechanical robots and dupes who are forced to comply with the dictates of some system. Structural theories, in other words, lack people with agency: actors who have choices and take meaningful actions. Structuralists thus produce a bloodless social science: People are the victims of and silent witnesses to history. This bloodless social science means that structural theories miss politics: the strategic interaction among goal-seeking individuals. They also miss human activity, creativity, and ingenuity. Rationalists thus charge that strict structuralists miss collective action and coalitional processes. This bloodless social science also means that structural theories are deterministic: Given structure, outcomes follow. Structural causes are so powerful that everything becomes predictable: There are imperatives and not possibilities, dictates and not contingencies. To structuralists, in sum, structure is fate. This perspective leads to historical fatalism, an iron cage determinism, and the absence of voluntarism.

Rationalist thinking therefore culminates in materialism, culturalist thought in idealism, and structural tenets in determinism. Hard-core rationalists lose values and contexts, true-believer culturalists miss choice and constraint, and die-hard structuralists miss action and orientation. Bates (1989), Scott (1985), and Skocpol (1979) are well aware of these lacunae. In order to advance their research communities, they willingly make these trade-offs.

### SUBTRADITIONS

Each tradition specializes: Rationalists concentrate on action, culturalists focus on norms, and structuralists center on conditions. "Thin" versions of programs stick closely to their traditional cores. Consequently, one can test the program in a very fundamental way. The problem, however, is that the program is easily falsified:

<sup>19</sup>In practice, of course, the level of constraints varies from situation to situation and may produce more or less limited choices. Inglehart (1990: 18) wisely suggests that

on one hand, one can conceive of situations so totally rigidly structured that virtually nothing the individual can do affects his or her fate. The situation of a prisoner in a concentration camp may be very near this extreme. On the other hand, one can also conceive of situations in which what happens mainly reflects the individual's behavior; a libertarian society with lavish and well-distributed resources might approach this ideal. In the real world, one is almost never at either extreme; outcomes reflect both internal orientations and external constraints.

sified: Exclusivity slights a great deal of the complex empirical world and hence produces unsatisfactory explanations of the richness of social life. "Thick" versions of research programs therefore begin to look empirically attractive to the members of each research community. Pragmatic researchers willingly add on elements from the other approaches. Consequently, a single tradition can subsume many specific theories, and one can test the program but not in any basic way. The three research communities thus contain an internal struggle between the purists and the monopolists, or between those who wish to develop thin versions of the program and those who wish to develop thick ones.

Rationalists study individual action and social outcomes. Thin rationalists are pure intentionalists who see reasons as causes of action. They have a reductionist view of conditions and culture that understands them as individual beliefs and desires. For example, economists who do public choice (e.g., Becker 1976) focus on a supposedly universal human nature and its laws: diminishing marginal utility, irrelevance of fixed costs, substitutes and complements in choice, market equilibrium of supply and demand, etc. Hence, thin rationalists might be more accurately called "human-nature rationalists." One can extend the boundaries of the rationalist approach by deepening the micro, and hence studying culture, and exploring the macro, and hence examining institutions (Lichbach 1995: chap. 10). Thick rationalists like Bates thus move toward structure by looking at conditions as both causes and effects (although they do not go all the way to the structuralist position and explore how structure affects the constitution of actors themselves). Thick rationalists like Bates also move toward culture by looking at preferences (although they do not go all the way to study how actors are themselves constituted by values) and beliefs (although they do not go all the way and become cognitive psychologists) as both causes and effects. Hence, thick rationalists might be more accurately called "social-situation rationalists." Bates thus begins with the historically specific opportunity structure in Kenya which defines the desires, beliefs, and choices of Kenyans. In addition to exploring how the concrete situation in Kenya constrains or limits, and enables or empowers, individual Kenyans, Bates also examines how Kenyans determine their historically concrete situation: The economic, social, and political institutions and outcomes of Kenyan political economy are endogenous.

Culturalists study subjective and intersubjective values and beliefs. Thin culturalists include the survey researchers who maintain that actors make culturally informed choices. They also maintain that material structures must always be filtered through ideas – values and beliefs. Culturalists broaden their perimeter by analyzing how culture defines choices and structures. Thick culturalists thus explore the decision rules behind choice and how actors are constituted by culture. Intersubjective approaches that take a thick view of culture include Gramscian hegemonic culturalists and Parsonian functionalists. Subjective and intersubjective subtraditions is a very significant divide. Samuel H. Barnes in this volume refers to it as the "I/we problem: Culture is what *we* believe, not what *I* believe." Marc Howard Ross's essay in this volume surveys the

Structuralists study civil society, the state, and the international system of states. Structuralists include the pluralists, Marxists, and statist. Thin structuralists are materialists. They argue that a base or substructure drives a periphery or superstructure. They also minimize the significance of actors and their freedom to choose. Since they see choice and culture as derivative of structures, thin structuralists often do not even bother to examine them. Structuralists thicken their approach by studying how the reason and nonrationality contained in structures are manifested in actions and orientations. Thick structuralists thus explore the materially driven dynamics of structures of collective action and social norms.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, purists/traditionalists and monopolists/synthesizers pull their research programs in opposite directions. Purists keep the approaches close to their traditional roots; they therefore minimize within-tradition variance and maximize between-tradition variance. Their extensions are usually trivial and their arguments most often turn out to be wrong. Monopolists move their approaches beyond their traditional core to synthesize perspectives; they therefore maximize within-tradition variance and minimize between-tradition variance. Their extensions are usually more interesting, but it is usually hard to know whether the program is producing the really useful insights.

### SECTION 3: THE SOCIALLY EMBEDDED UNIT ACT

These basic similarities and differences in rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought raise deeper interpretive questions: What is the meaning and significance of the three approaches? How can we understand and appreciate the dispute among the three research communities that characterize contemporary comparative politics? And why, after all, is today's battle of the paradigms taking place among rationalists, culturalists, and structuralists and, unlike the 1960s, not among functionalists, systems theorists, and Marxists?

Such questions are best approached by setting the dialogue among the schools within the historical context of the development of social theory. The origins of social thought provide clues to contemporary understandings and debates in comparative politics. More specifically, comparativists can begin to appreciate the similarities and differences and the connections and disjunctures among the research schools by exploring how the approaches can be traced to Parsons's unit act and Weber's paradox of modernity.

<sup>20</sup>Ima Kartznelson's essay in this volume offers another way to parse structuralism: One tradition (e.g., Moore, Skocpol) develops grand macroanalytic narratives of world-historical importance while another "smaller-scale historical institutionalism" (e.g., the one described by Peter A. Hall in his essay in this volume) is more empirically and theoretically restrained and makes the relatively modest claim that histories and institutions matter.

Parsons (1937) used the conceptual device of the "unit act" to systematize or rationalize the ideas of several of the founders of social thought.<sup>21</sup> His purpose was to unite the rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist foci on interests, identities, and institutions into one framework. The "action frame of reference," part of his voluntaristic theory of action, was the first attempt to end the war of the schools and integrate the conflicting paradigms.<sup>22</sup>

Building on Weber's ([1924] 1968) idea of social action, one can say that both acts and contexts matter and hence that all acts are socially embedded. I have therefore extended the unit act to take account of the structure-action problem of reconciling individuals and collectivities.<sup>23</sup> The socially embedded unit act is represented in Figure 1. The diagram has three layers – an inner or individual layer, a middle or collective layer, and an outer or approach layer – which reveal important connections among the schools.

#### THE INNER OR INDIVIDUAL LAYER

The socially embedded unit act involves a hypothetical person in a situation in which the world is at least partially under his or her control. The actor thus has some agency: He or she manifests subjectivity, has purpose, possesses free will, uses reason, and acts. The presumed result is human creativity and personal responsibility.

Philosophical discussions of intentional explanation and technical discussions of individual decision making therefore stress that agents possess three important characteristics (Elster 1989). They have desires – goals, purposes, and ends – that they intend to satisfy. They have beliefs – information and knowledge – about their situation. Finally, they make choices – act, do, and perform – in order to reach their goals. In sum, at the individual level desires and beliefs direct action.

<sup>21</sup>For nearly two decades, Parsons's unit act and related conceptual schemes dominated a great deal of social science. Many of the paradigms that became popular during comparative politics's earlier flirtation with theory and generalization in the 1950s and 1960s were rooted in Parsons (e.g., structural functionalism).

<sup>22</sup>Parsons eventually moved from a general theory of action – a view of social order as resulting from the contingency of individualistic decision making and the voluntaristic interaction of isolated individuals in some larger framework of norms and values – to a structural-functional scheme – a systems theory of social order based on functional or systemic imperatives. This chapter does not consider the entirety of Parsons's thought, including the structure-function scheme and "general action complexes" that synthesize social, cultural, personality, and behavioral aspects of modern societies. For a review of Parsons's work, see Scull and Gerstein (1985). An important recent contribution is Camic (1989).

<sup>23</sup>Parsons's (1937) presentation of the unit act in fact mixes the individual and collective levels. Actors have goals. The situation in which they find themselves is pared into two parts – conditions and means. Conditions are the material elements which cannot be molded to the actor's purposes; they are the obstacles that constrain agency about which actors develop beliefs. Means are the choices or actions undertaken by the actor that enable agency. Finally, actors approach the situation with certain norms. They use their own subjective judgments or standards to interpret or understand their situation. The pursuit of goals and the choice of means is therefore judged by normative considerations, ideal standards, or value expectations.

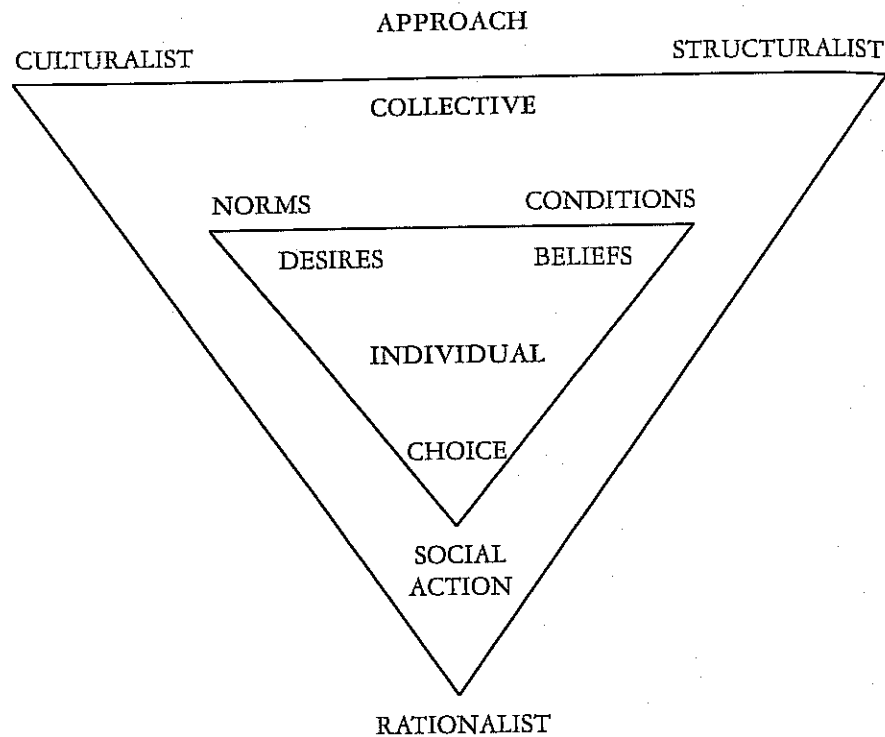


Figure 1. *The Socially Embedded Unit Act: The Basic Diagram*

### THE MIDDLE OR COLLECTIVE LAYER

The socially embedded unit act also involves sets of individuals who comprise some collectivity. People, in other words, are part of some social order.

The structure-action or individual-collective problem involves linkages between the three properties of agency and three corresponding properties of society. Individual desires reflect and produce social norms. Individual beliefs correspond to and ultimately influence material conditions. Finally, individual action aggregates into and also responds to collective action. In sum, at the collective level cultural norms and environmental conditions affect social action.

### THE OUTSIDE OR RESEARCH COMMUNITY LAYER

All grand syntheses, like Parsons's voluntaristic theory of action, become the object of close scrutiny. The intellectual division of labor takes its toll. Specialists have therefore appropriated each of the components of the socially embedded unit act and spawned a research community. There are now experts in action (the rationalists), norms (the culturalists), and conditions (the structuralists).

Hence, the outer layer of the diagram indicates that each of the schools concentrates on one vertex of the triangle. Culturalists specialize in individual desires and cultural norms, structuralists in individual beliefs and environmental conditions, and rationalists in individual choice and social action.<sup>24</sup>

### THE CONNECTIONS AMONG THE LAYERS

The connections among these three layers problematize several important themes in social theory and hence reveal several significant relationships among the approaches. First, Figure 1 clarifies why the debate among Marxists, structural functionalists, systems theorists, etc., in the 1960s evolved into a debate among rationalists, culturalists, and structuralists in the 1990s. Theoretical thinking has sharpened and the issues are now crisper. Hence, there is now a certain symmetry among the competing positions, which is occurring throughout the social sciences,<sup>25</sup> that was missing from the earlier "war of the schools." Each contemporary school coalesces around a subject matter: Choice, culture, and context are the domains of study. Each adopts an ontology: Reasons, rules, and relations constitute the world. Each explores a key explanatory variable: Interests, identities, and institutions drive outcomes. Finally, each lends itself to a theory of social order: The intersection of strategies, symbols, and structures define society. In sum, our problem situations and research designs in comparative politics consist of three natural models and foils. The value in juxtaposing the approaches is that critical confrontations reveal the junctures where a school's lacunae are best addressed by the other schools.

Second, the socially embedded unit act clarifies the central issue in social thought: the structure-action problem of uniting micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. The difficulty here is that human beings are the continually active subjects who make the eternally passive objects which limit their subjectivity.<sup>26</sup> Individuals are therefore more or less intentional agents who make history, society, conditions, and rules and yet history, society, conditions, and rules make individuals. We are both autonomous creators and dependent creatures, innovators and prisoners. The world is both fact and counterfactual, constraint and construct. Some examples will drive home the point:

Taking and selling prisoners becomes the institution of slavery. Offering one's services to a soldier in return for his protection becomes feudalism. Organizing the control of an enlarged labour force on the basis of standardized rules becomes bureaucracy. And slavery, feudalism and bureaucracy be-

<sup>24</sup>There are several individualistic, micro, or action approaches to inquiry besides rational choice. When I considered culturalist approaches, for example, I briefly discussed subjectivist approaches (e.g., modern survey research) that offer a richer focus on the cognition, reasoning, motivation, and existential meaning the individual actor attaches to his or her action. There are also richer intersubjective approaches to consciousness that emphasize praxis or the enactment and performance of social acts.

<sup>25</sup>See footnote 3.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, Giddens (1984), Habermas (1987), and Seligman and Liechbach (1996).

come the fixed, eternal settings in which struggles for prosperity or survival or freedom are then pursued. By substituting cash payments for labour services the lord and peasant jointly embark on the dismantling of the feudal order their great grandparents had constructed. (Abrams 1982: 2-3)

The structure-action problem is concerned, more specifically, with interrelating the three aspects of the micro (individual), meso (group and institutional), and macro (societal) levels of analysis. The first is the aggregation problem: how unintended, unwanted, unexpected, unpredictable and yet seemingly inevitable collective outcomes result from a set of more or less purposeful individual actions. The second is the institutionalization problem: how these emergent properties solidify over time into structures. The third is the contextual problem: how this solidified social order comes to constrain and enable individual consciousness and action. Hence, the structure-action problem has important normative<sup>27</sup> and positive<sup>28</sup> implications, especially about freedom and determinism, and hence the possibilities of rationality and nonrationality.

A glance at the socially embedded unit act diagram shows how the framework goes beyond Parsons's individualistic unit act and clarifies these issues. Looking vertically, one discovers that there are actually two structure-action problems: culture and rational action, structure and rational action. Looking horizontally, there is one structure-structure problem: culture and structure. Legitimacy and social order thus rest on the harmonization of institutions and identities, identities and interests, and interests and institutions. In addition, the aggregation problem exists for all components of the socially embedded unit act — action (individual action and collective action), values (individual preferences and collective values), and beliefs (individual cognitions and institutional development). Rationalization thus occurs in the action sphere, where individual and collective action is reconciled through organization; in the ideal sphere, where the abstraction and systematization of values (substantive rationality) proceeds; and in the material sphere, where bureaucratization (functional rationality) develops. The parts of the inner or individual layer of the socially embedded unit act (desires, beliefs, and action) are thus associated with the middle layer of spheres of society (ideal culture, material structure, and group action), something

<sup>27</sup>The individual-society issue is important normatively. All societies must deal with value conflicts among individuals and harmonize social values. All societies must then establish principles of the good life and reconcile them with the principles of the good society. All societies must create an ethical totality in the face of possible fragmentation, polytheism, and a relativistic "everything goes" mentality. Societies must, in short, establish legitimacy. However, our western values lead us to wish to preserve agency, as did Weber. The individual-society issue therefore cuts to the core of the liberal agenda. It is intimately associated with an analyst's philosophical or value orientations.

<sup>28</sup>The individual-society problematique is related to all the major issues in positive political theory. Questions of personality (being, autonomy, existence, and alienation), culture (legitimacy, trust, morality, justice, and ethics), economics (market, socialism, equity, efficiency, and welfare), society (civil society, contract, corporatism, community), conflict and cooperation (peace, war), and politics (the state, democracy, and liberalism) entangle with the structure-action problem.

that was not clear in Parsons's individualistic unit act. Hence, an individual's desires are a reflection of his or her ideal culture; an individual's beliefs are founded on the material structure in which he or she exists; and an individual's actions are a part of the activities of some collectivity. There are also individual-collective connections across the parts of the socially embedded unit act. One may investigate, for example, how individual actions reflect collective values. Hence, one may explore connections at the collective level, at the individual level, and across the individual-collective divide, both within and between parts of the socially embedded unit act.

Third, the socially embedded unit act clarifies the competing perspectives on two other grand issues of social thought: social order and social change. Each school generates a theory of social order: Social order is based either on reason, common values, or a hierarchical structure's imposition of material rewards and punishments (Lichbach 1996). Each school also generates a theory of social change. Rationalists explore how individuals react to the unintended and unwanted social consequences of rational action and construct new institutions — which are, of course, subject to dysfunctions and hence institutional change. Culturalists focus on how culture institutionalizes structures and hence how cultural change renders situations obsolete. Institutionalists explore the historical dynamics of structures.

Finally, consider how the diagram relates to the nominalism vs. realism debate. I employ a Weberian nominalist rather than a structural realist orientation to the three research schools. Since Weber's "ideal types" address general methodological problems in comparative politics, and since the nature of ideal types sets the boundaries of this conceptual exercise, Weber's ideal-type analysis bears elaboration (Weber [1903-17] 1949).

One cannot study all the theories and approaches that exist in contemporary comparative politics in all of their complexity and flux. The chaos of the theoretical world is as severe as the chaos of the empirical world. Hence, we need orienting models and guiding frameworks that define and frame questions and problems. These are of necessity selective working heuristic tools rather than exhaustive and exact depictions of reality. They embody, in other words, a rather one-sided picture of the "reality" of the theories in comparative politics that exaggerates, accentuates, intensifies, highlights, and dramatizes certain features.

The socially embedded unit act is therefore a typology or classification scheme designed to juxtapose the three "ideal types" (not all possible types) of social theory now found in our most prominent research communities. What are the central and significant features of the theories that deserve emphasis in these ideal types? One must take account of the goals, perspectives, and ideas of the theorists themselves. I also have interests and values — what Weber calls value relevance — in exploring those features that I consider significant for contemporary social theory. The ideal types of rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought that I have developed mix both sets of concerns.

Each ideal type theory is thus logically coherent: ontology, methodology, comparison, lacunae, and subtraditions form a whole. This demonstrates that there is a certain internal logic to my interpretation of the value systems held by each set of theorists.

The set of ideal types – the classification scheme – reveals certain contrasts that allow the exploration of the alternatives and conflicts inherent in the differentiation among the types. More concretely, the typology can be used to generate four fruitful types of comparison among types (general theoretical traditions) and cases (particular theories). First, one can compare among the types to show their similarities and differences. Weber thus explores types and subtypes, sets and subsets, of cases. I have drawn numerous comparisons in rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought. Second, one can compare among cases. Weber thus argues that one needs clear concepts before one can show the similarities and (especially) the differences among cases. I have drawn numerous comparisons among the theories developed by Bates, Scott, and Skocpol. Third, one can compare a type with a case within its range (to show its applicability). Weber thus uses an ideal type as a yardstick to define individual cases: It is a standard against which empirical cases can be measured. By comparing the real with the ideal, Weber is able to throw a case into relief, highlighting errors and assessing deviations. I have drawn comparisons between rationalism and Bates, culturalism and Scott, and structuralism and Skocpol. Finally, one can examine a single case from the point of view of several ideal types. Weber thus tries to explain particular cases by applying a battery of ideal types and theories. Actual cases, in other words, are unique, specific, and distinctive combinations of the ideal types. The next section will therefore analyze Weber from rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist perspectives.

These four sets of contrasts, analogies, and juxtapositions allow comparativists to fruitfully mix the general and the specific, engaging theories and the cases. They allow Weber to place cases and situate developments within general contexts; they facilitate general comparative and typological explication of particular events and situations; and they enable him to focus his analysis on those cases that had great substantive and theoretical significance. Moreover, ideal type analysis makes comparativists aware of the pitfalls of moving from theory to case. Weber argues that ideal types are only useful fictions that do not exhaust and exactly depict reality. Hence, they should not be reified into something “real” rather than something “nominal”: They cannot be used to “deduce” cases and therefore they are not “falsified” by locating deviations from real cases.

I have therefore combined various properties of social theories (e.g., ontology, methodology) to produce three types of social theories. The ideal-type rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist research communities developed here should be judged on pragmatic grounds: They are useful or not useful for this or that problem from this or that conceptual point of view; they should be displaced by another set of ideal types that highlight different and, from another point of view, more significant aspects of the reality of contemporary comparative politics.

In sum, a consideration of three ideal-type research schools forces comparativists to confront some fundamental issues in social theory: the nature of the competing paradigms and the structure–action, social order–social change, and nominalism–realism debates. The socially embedded unit act helps clarify, albeit not solve, these enduring issues.

#### SECTION 4: MAX WEBER, MODERNITY, AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS TODAY

Parsons's failed synthesis thus holds the key to a deeper understanding of the connections and disjunctures among the three research communities that dominate contemporary comparative politics. Any satisfactory substantive explanation in our field will employ one or more of these sets of “nuts and bolts” (Elster 1989). But what would be the purpose of such a theory? What is the historical situation in which social scientists find themselves that requires understanding?

Max Weber<sup>29</sup> argues that social scientists should begin inquiry by analyzing the value relevance of the problem situation in which they find themselves. Weber thus explores the world-historical significance of his own circumstances and then evaluates his state of affairs from the point of view of a normative theory of politics: how people ought to live, the definition and implementation of the common good, and what is the best or right life and regime. This reflection led Weber to identify his central problem, and surely the central problem of his age, as the dialectic of modernity, or how modernity emancipates and exploits.<sup>30</sup>

Medieval thought centered on the word of God as revealed through the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. As Hawthorn (1976: 8), paraphrasing Hobbes, puts it, “Reason was always and necessarily subservient to revelation, which alone could reveal God's purpose.” Weber's concerns, and indeed the concerns of all of the founders of social thought, can be traced to a process, begun in the Renaissance and continuing in the Enlightenment, that disputed medieval thinking. The rigid but stable old order of communities and hierarchies, based on ecclesiastical, feudal, and monarchical authority, was challenged by cognitively and morally reasoning individuals (Nisbet 1966). These individuals attempted to create a new rational order in all spheres of social life.

<sup>29</sup>It is fascinating to recall how much of the language of contemporary comparativists can be traced to Weber: ideal interests and material interests; ideal type and *verstehen*; class, status, and party; traditional, charismatic, and rational legitimacy; formal and substantive rationality; the iron cage of reason and the disenchantment of the world; bureaucracy and the modern state; the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility; and the Protestant ethic and a calling. Behind this vocabulary lie Weber's methodology and substantive theories which have also had a lasting impact on comparative politics.

<sup>30</sup>Weber's master problem has also been identified as the origins of capitalism and the West, the nature of domination and the state, and the science of culture (Hennis 1983; Nelson 1974; Schroeder 1992; chap. 1; Tembruck 1980).

Modernity thus involved the growth of reason that culminated in a series of macro changes involving the rationalization of social structures. In politics, liberal democracy, the rule of law, and state bureaucracy were created. In international relations, globalization and internationalism culminated in a world system. In the intellectual world, science and technology were founded. In the economic world, bourgeois capitalism – markets, industrialization, mass consumption, and manufacturing – were developed. In civil society, specialization, division of labor, complexity, and pluralism were fashioned. Finally, the culture sphere saw the growth of liberalism, individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, humanism, secularism, materialism, and the idea of progress.

The project of modernity thus involved reason at two levels. At the individual level, individual rationality and moral autonomy were to be constitutive of identities. At the societal level, the rationalization of structures and institutions were to be constitutive of social order.

Weber (1946: 117) is a rationalist in that he warns about the paradoxical consequences of this modernity: "The final result of political action often, no, even regularly, stands in completely inadequate and often even paradoxical relation to its original meaning." The macro transitions and transformations, in other words, produce new irrationalities, instabilities, inefficiencies, and contradictions that challenge social order. Modern western (occidental) rationality, he maintains, is concerned with means-ends calculations (formal rationality) rather than with reasoned judgments about the value of ends themselves (substantive rationality). The drive to control all aspects of the natural and human worlds has several structural consequences: imperialism and dependence, or the ruthless expansion and exploitation of the planet and all of its peoples, which inevitably produce destructive wars; the bureaucratization of everything, or the growth of rationalized and anonymous administrative systems that regulate all forms of modern life, which ultimately controls the body and sexuality; and the struggle by all peoples for nationalism and democracy, which finally cause intractable and deadly conflicts. The policy consequences are equally dramatic: Humans create an artificial world of irrationalities; this begets further rational means-ends calculations, which result in another round of policy interventions designed to rid the world of the first-order irrationalities; in the end, newer and deeper irrationalities result. The drive to control the natural and social worlds also has major consequences for values: the secularization of culture (what Weber calls the "disenchantment of the world," or the expulsion of magic, myths, and all forms of irrational social life) and the standardization of culture (what others have called massification and homogenization). Finally, the supposedly rational individuals suffer the most dire consequences of all: the loss of certainty about the meaning and purpose of their lives. Moral individualism, the radical isolation, separation, and divorce of individuals from all social ties, is responsible for several evils: The commodification and depersonalization of social relationships, and hence the deterioration of common values and the shrinking of a shared ethical space, are perhaps expected outcomes: the growth of feelings of alienation and powerlessness,

and the resulting failure of the will to power (the drive to self-perfection and self-promotion, or the desire to perfect and extend the self by relying on personal creative power rather than depending on anything external), are perhaps paradoxical outcomes; solipsism, relativism, and perspectivism are perhaps logical outcomes; and since people need meaning, the rise of fundamentalisms, myths, and superstitions to replace the traditional values that have been lost is perhaps the inevitable outcome of moral individualism.

In the twentieth century, these structural, policy, cultural, and individual developments culminated in pathologies unimaginably worse than the greatest evils of the premodern world: two world wars and totalitarianism. The logical consequence of reason applied to means and not ends was the Holocaust: The trains ran on time but to a place inconceivable to all but moderns. Rational means had furthered irrational ends, and an unimaginably pathological and barbaric irrationality at that.<sup>31</sup>

Weber is also a culturalist in that he explores a fascinating paradox in the origins of modern rationality: how the irrational quest for meaning and salvation helped create the rational individuals and institutions of the modern world. He hypothesizes that "Calvin's doctrine of predestination resulted, among his followers, not in fatalism, not in a frantic search for earthly pleasures, but curiously and counterintuitively – in methodical activity informed by purpose and self-denial" (Hirschman 1977: 130). In other words, the Protestant Reformation produced ascetic Protestantism which, in turn, actualized the individualism that encouraged a rational social order: The spirit of capitalism motivated bourgeois capitalism; an inquisitive scientific outlook inspired the Cartesian-Newtonian scientific framework; moral individualism encouraged political liberalism; and methodical patterns of action galvanized state bureaucracies. Rationality, according to Weber, thus depends upon such irrational motivations as the Protestant doctrine of proof and the idea of a "calling." Swidler (1973: 41) concludes that "the values which motivate rationality, the control of ideas over action, must themselves be non-rational. There is always a sphere of social life which is non-rational, and it is on the preservation of this sphere that the rationality of the rest of the system depends." Only meaning, faith, and a calling can save us from the irrationalities of reason.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Weber is also a structuralist in that he studies how the institutional dynamics of state and society cage individuals in the dialectic of reason and irrationality. He explores the institutionalization of three types or systems of domination or authority – rational, traditional, and charismatic legitimacy ([1924] 1968) – and the logics of three types or systems of stratification – class, status,

<sup>31</sup>The postmodernists challenge the "logic" of such grand historical narratives.

<sup>32</sup>Science, according to Weber, is perhaps the best example of how the basis of rationality is an irrational commitment to ultimate values. He suggests that values guide the choice of scientific problems and that the commitment to science is itself a value commitment based on the desire to shape the world. Hirschman (1977: 38) concludes that "unintended consequences flow from human thought (and from the shape it is given through language) no less than from human actions."



and party (1946). Weber also examines the development of the legal system ([1924] 1968), the dynamics of premodern and modern capitalisms ([1923] 1961, [1896] 1988), and the rationalization of religious belief systems (1951, 1952, [1904-05] 1985, [1958] 1992).

In sum, at the beginning of the century, Weber explores modernity's dialectic of reason and irrationality in individuals and collectivities. He conducts comparative and historical, positive and normative, analyses of the rationalization (reconciliation, harmonization, and development) of individual and society. He does so, moreover, in rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist terms.<sup>33</sup>

Weber's master problem of modernity is today, the dawn of the third millennium, still the master problem of comparative politics: "We live... amid the debris of Reason" (Seligman 1992: 1). Enlightenment trends engulf the state (e.g., the worldwide growth of democracy) and the economy (e.g., the global movement to markets). Counterenlightenment trends, however, overwhelm civil society (e.g., the growth of ethnic diversity and the consequent rise of intractable social conflicts) and cultural life (e.g., postmodernism, religious fundamentalisms, mysticisms, and relativisms of all sorts). While democracy and markets represent developments that continue to support reason, ethnic and cultural wars are developments that continue to challenge reason. The problems of modernity and postmodernity are on today's agenda in the liberal and market-oriented West. Due to the West's influence, they are also momentous issues facing the entire world community of nations.

To the true Enlightenment mind, the failings of modernity are simply problems to be solved. Moderns assume, after all, that the social world is open to human control. Truth and value can be rationally discovered (if not created): Through the universal scientific method, humans can conquer the natural world and social life. Descartes's self, in other words, can unlock Newton's mechanical universe and Plato's social world. The rational organization of society can end human bondage to physical nature and social institutions and bring moral progress, social justice, and human happiness. Moderns, in short, can create utopia: the perfect human society that enables a rationally managed life. An Enlightenment social science, rationally divided into several disciplines, is therefore needed to understand modernity and solve its problems. Today's students of comparative politics thus explore the dialectic of modernity in ways rooted in Weber: The deeper unity among the approaches is therefore that they offer critical commentaries on the emergent institutions of modernity.

The rationalist Weber examines status groups and social classes with material interests in order to explore the unintended negative consequences of reason. Contemporary rationalists also explore the modernity problematique by concentrating on reason: Instrumental rationality, after all, is the hegemonic mode of

<sup>33</sup>Weber's thought is complex and difficult to pigeonhole. For example, he did not manifest all the ideal-type properties of a structuralist: As a methodological individualist, he made no ontological commitment to the existence of collectivities.

thought in the modern world. Rationalists thus seek to understand how choice controls reason yet produces irrationality. Just as in Weber's studies of the paradoxical consequences of rationality, today's rationalists explore the intended and positive, as well as the unintended and negative, consequences of rationality. In Kenya, for example, Bates (1989) finds that reasoning voters and politicians, consumers and producers, create drought, famine, and subsistence crises. Rationalist solutions to the modern problems of democracy and capitalism tend to stress that more rationality is needed: A more efficient economic market, social contract, and political liberalism creates reason and hence overcomes many of the pathologies of modernity.

The culturalist Weber examines religious ethics and normative orders in order to explore the irrationality that drove the rationality that turned irrational. Contemporary culturalists also explore the modernity problematique by concentrating on the nonrational: Reason, after all, cannot accomplish everything because it is self-destructive and negates itself. Culturalists thus seek to understand the values which give reason and rationality their meaning and significance. Just as in Weber's studies of the nonrational origins of modern occidental rationality, today's culturalists explore how culture constitutes reason, or how culture contextualizes thought and establishes the boundaries of rationality. In Malaysia, for example, Scott (1985) analyses the fragile ideological hegemony of the landed elite over the peasantry and traces the basis of an irrational class order to the creation of identities and communities. Culturalist solutions to the modern problems of diversity and social conflict tend to stress the nonrational: The homogeneity of values and beliefs found in true communities allows the construction of more fully human identities that are the antidote to many of the pathologies of modernity.

The structuralist Weber examines patterns of stratification and systems of domination in order to explore the institutional logics of the forces that operate behind the backs of reasoning and nonrational individuals. Contemporary structuralists also explore the modernity problematique by concentrating on the containment or constraint of reason and rationality: The rational choice teleology, after all, is limited by the resiliency of society and power. Nature restricts man's powers, and not the reverse. Newton's mechanistic world strikes back at Descartes's autonomous self. The determinism of structuralist thought is also attractive to moderns.<sup>34</sup> Structuralists thus seek to understand the "iron cage" of forces<sup>35</sup> that results from and constrains rationality and nonrationality. Just as in

<sup>34</sup>Bloom (1987: 255) points out that Tocqueville warned against democracy's attraction to deterministic explanations: "Tocqueville explained this tendency as a consequence of the importance of the individual in egalitarian society. Curiously in democracy, the freest of societies, men turn out to be more willing to accept doctrines that tell them that they are determined, that is, not free. No one by himself seems to be able, or have the right, to control events, which appear to be moved by impersonal forces. In aristocracies, on the other hand, individuals born to high position have too great a sense of their control over what they appear to command, are sure of their freedom and despise everything that might seem to determine them."

<sup>35</sup>See footnote 5.

Weber's studies of institutional dynamics, today's structuralists explore the constraints of the concrete material world. In France, Russia, and China, for example, Skocpol (1979) argues that revolution resulted from the state being enmeshed in two sets of constraining structures: international relations, which consist of political and economic conflict among states, and domestic relations, which consist of conflict between dominant and subordinate classes. Structuralist solutions to the pathologies of modernity tend to stress institutions and organizations: Reformers need strong and rationalized state bureaucracies to cope with the economic and political competition that arises from the system of states and from the internal disorder that arises from conflicting social forces; radicals need an organized group of like-thinking individuals to destroy and eventually remake the state.

The question of modernity will remain our master problem well into the next century. Contemporary comparativists will grapple with its challenges by specializing in each of Weber's perspectives. Our historical situation offers us great theoretical leverage. On the one hand, understanding Weber's master problem helps us appreciate the significance of the approaches. Rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought have an underlying unity because they offer critical commentaries on the same central problem of modernity. On the other hand, understanding rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought helps us appreciate the significance of these challenges. The dialectic of reason and irrationality in individuals and collectivities can be understood and reconciled in three inter-related ways.

## SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

My assumption throughout this chapter has been that all research is conducted within a framework of concepts and methods and hence that theoretical criticism assists concrete empirical work. Comparativists should reflect on the presuppositions that underpin their practices. Our theorists and theories need to be reflexive and self-critical, aware of their goals, assumptions, and limitations, and willing to publicly explicate and defend their commitments. Even problem-oriented comparativists cannot maintain a strict separation between theoretical and substantive concerns. They should recognize that a more critical understanding of theories is the best way to elaborate, reformulate, and extend substantive insights.

My goal has therefore been to move reflection about the nature of social theory onto the agenda of comparative politics. My means has been to elaborate three ideal-type research schools. I have shown, for example, that the structure/action, nominalism/realism, holism/individualism, materialism/idealism, rationality/culture, and subject/object debates are relevant to a sophisticated appreciation of the work of important comparativists such as Bates, Scott, and Skocpol.

The field of comparative politics is in a particularly good position to appreciate these issues of social theory that are embedded in the rationalist-culturalist-structuralist dialogue. Comparativists, after all, study the macrotransformations of state and society and the microchanges in individuals and their identities associated with modernity. Comparative politics is the natural home of Mills's (1959) "sociological imagination." Hence, the battle of the paradigms contributes to comparative politics, and comparative politics contributes to the battle of the paradigms. The comparative and historical analysis of rationality, culture, and structure will be central to the agenda of comparative politics in the twenty-first century. Future comparativists will choose to work within one or more of these frameworks.

Comparativists who are engaged in such study should recall the words of Rabbi Menachem Mendel: "For the believer there are no questions; for the non-believer there are no answers." There is always the danger that proponents of a research community will become true believers and view their opponents as their bitter enemies. If this occurs, the "battle of the paradigms" or the "war of the schools" in contemporary comparative politics will take on the character of an interfaith disputation out of the Middle Ages. We must avoid this. Comparativists need a "dialogue of the hearing" in which believers ask searching questions and nonbelievers offer valuable answers.

Comparativists who are engaged in such study should also think about Weber. His case and comparative case studies remain unparalleled, by far the best exemplars for young comparativists. Weber had an uncanny eye for the central theoretical dilemma that confronts a particular problem area. Weber was successful because he, more than anyone else, realized that the key analytical issue underlying inquiry most often revolves around the rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist dialogue. After nearly a century, his work remains the most satisfactory resolution of this enduring issue of social thought. Weber was a rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist who produced the most creative synthesis — of structure and action, of individual and collectivity — that has ever been made. Given their roots in Weber, it is clear that rationalists, culturalists, and structuralists can make rich and exciting contributions to comparative politics. Bates, Scott, and Skocpol have proven that comparativists can legitimately and productively define their perspective as a positivist focus on explaining rational action and choice, an interpretive focus on understanding values and beliefs, a realist focus on comprehending structures and their dynamics, or, most enticingly, any combination thereof.<sup>36</sup>

In sum, I offer a four-part thesis about improving the state of theory in comparative politics. First, if we approach theory by believing that our field consists only of a "messy center," our search for better theory will end almost immediately. Second, if, on the other hand, we embrace creative confrontations, which

<sup>36</sup>The chapters by Peter A. Hall and by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly in this volume stress the value of fruitful interactions among the approaches.

can include well-defined syntheses, among the strongly defined research communities in our field, reflexive understandings of theorists of their theories will flourish. Third, contemporary comparativists can get the most out of such a dialogue by appreciating the historical context of the development of social theory. Finally, contemporary comparativists can also gain from such a dialogue by recognizing that the approaches offer a critical commentary on the challenges of modernity which, in turn, helps us appreciate the significance of rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist thought.

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## REFORMULATING EXPLANATORY STANDARDS AND ADVANCING THEORY IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS\*

*Alan S. Zuckerman*

And if you ask me how, wherefore, for what reason? I will answer you: Why, by chance! By the merest chance, as things do happen, lucky and unlucky, terrible or tender, important, or unimportant; and even things which are neither, things so completely neutral in character that you would wonder why they do happen at all if you didn't know that they, too, carry in their insignificance the seeds of further incalculable chances (Joseph Conrad, cited in Kellert 1993: 49).

[U]nforeseen catastrophes are never the consequence of the effect, if you prefer, of a single motive, of a cause singular; but they are rather like a whirlpool, a cyclonic point of depression in the consciousness of the world, towards which a whole multitude of causes have contributed (Gadda [1957] 1984: 5).

The Danube does not exist, that is as clear as day. The Danube is not something, not the water, not the molecules, not the dangerous currents, but the *totality*: the Danube is the form. The form is not some mantle beneath which something still more serious lies hidden (Esterhazy 1994: 24).

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